

GSbeyond

Policy Plan 2024

Board 53

29-11-2023



0.0 Foreword

As you look through this year's policy plan, you might notice some considerable differences from the layout you are used to. This is not due to carelessness or negligence. In an effort to keep the policy plan accessible and to give people the chance to give feedback, Board 53 has made the conscious effort to keep this document as succinct as possible.

In the past, we used to use the LSVb format for the policy plan, in which every minute detail about every portfolio was written out. The result is that you get a policy plan that is more than 50 pages long and, for most people, impossible to get through. By only writing about the yearly campaign and what's changing, we create an opportunity for feedback and therefore make the process more democratised.

Change is a key word for 2024.

The GSb will of course remain the same union you know and love at its core. However, it is time to stop aiming and to start reaching. In order to command political change for students, the union first needs internal changes to strengthen externally. The structure of this policy plan reflects these internal structural changes, and functions as a layout for the coming years. The new structure has been designed carefully, based on the principles of demonstrable accomplishments and sustainable growth. This way, change will not just stay change, but becomes a provision for lasting improvement.

Sincerely in solidarity,

Board 53 of the Groninger Studentenbond

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1.0 Campaign

The GSb has been lacking big campaigns since the end of the Niet Mijn Schuld campaign. Therefore, we are resolving to set up a yearly campaign for a specific issue affecting students that is reasonably achievable. There has been activism of course (1 May, Comité Vrouwenstrijd, energietoelag protest), but no campaigns. By doing this, the GSb can continue our activism in a focused and purposeful manner, as well as appeal to new potential members.

This year we want to do a campaign on HBO visibility. The GSb is becoming more visible at the Hanze due to the efforts of previous boards, but we are not at the desired level yet. We want to do a visibility campaign to increase our network at the Hanze and to make sure more Hanze students know we exist and use our services. During this campaign, we will make use of actions, ads, articles in papers, co-governance and much more.

This campaign ties in really well with our plans for co-governance. Going into co-governance at the Hanze and running an awareness campaign will strengthen each other. We initially thought about doing a campaign on food insecurity or lecture recordings, but we do not think we have the capacity to do that at the moment. So tying it in with co-governance will help with that.

2.0 What's changing

2.1 Co-Governance

We would like to rejoin co-governance structures to both counteract the GSb shrinking and to regain influence on education policy.

By investing energy now in getting into co-governance bodies, we will create factions that will keep generating active GSb members in return. It has been getting increasingly difficult to fill committees and the GSb has resorted to outside candidates for Board positions. Students have no strong incentive to join the union. If nothing is done, it is quite likely that the GSb will cease to exist within five years. Students from the factions will actively participate in the union and they will recruit their own successors. This will create structural growth and more active members for the GSb.

Furthermore, the GSb will rejoin the student representation elections at the RUG and the Hanzehogeschool to regain influence on education policy. The union has not been effective enough lately in influencing education policy at the RUG and the Hanzehogeschool. The faculties (RUG) and schools (Hanze) are the places where education policy is decided upon. The union will regain its influence on

education policy by joining these co-governance bodies. We will start with setting up several factions and we hope that future boards will continue to expand our reach and influence.

RUG faculties are quite hard to get elected into, while Hanze schools are quite easy to get elected into. This is why we have decided to create factions at one Faculty and four schools. There are also a lot more schools than faculties. This also ties in really well with the HBO visibility campaign.

We would like to present candidates at:

- ★ IBS (Hanze)
- ★ Hanze Academy for Social Studies (Hanze)
- ★ Hanze Institute for Communication, Media and IT (Hanze)
- ★ Hanze Academy Minerva (Hanze)
- ★ Health Studies (Hanze)
- ★ Faculty of Arts (RUG)

For every faculty/school we will have a campaign programme. The first part of the programme is the same for every faculty/school with some general goals of the GSb in co-governance written by the education team. The second part will be about goals specific to the faculty/school and will be written by the faction themselves. During the course of the academic year, factions will try to improve education by working towards these goals.

At the beginning of the academic year, several workshops will be organised about how to effectively utilise co-governance which all the faction members will attend. At every quarter, there will be a meeting with someone from every faction to discuss their progress and how they can help each other. We will ask the faction members to join a GSb committee and to be present at GMAs. Students that participate in co-governance receive quite a lot of money for it, we will therefore ask faction members if they are willing to donate 15% of what they receive to the GSb to fund campaigns.

2.2 Portfolio Restructuring

The GSb does too many things to do them well, we want to change that by limiting the amount of portfolios. All 52 boards before us wanted to add something to the union, which has created an organisation that is a jack of all trades, but master of none. It is time to create a more focused and effective organisation by reorganising and streamlining the portfolios.

We decided to cut the amount of portfolios we have by either dissolving some portfolios completely or having them be integrated into existing ones that overlap. This is also beneficial in terms of the well-being of board members, as it allows for a more efficient workflow. Less relevant portfolios demand an update in

meetings of the Board, the Advisory Council and the GMA, while more urgent topics would more so deserve prioritisation.

Moreover, some of the smaller portfolios lack substantive vision. This is not to say there was no good reason they were brought into existence, but they either no longer serve as strong of a purpose to be justified as their own portfolio, or are too broad for that purpose to be achieved. This does not mean the GSb is dropping these topics in its entirety. The Board will continue most of its running business related to the scrapped portfolios, and these will be housed within the new distribution. The new portfolios are distributed in a manner that reflects the Board's practices more accurately and allow for a more organised and centralised workflow.

The new portfolio distribution is as follows:

- ★ Acquisition
- ★ Campaign
- ★ Co-governance HBO
- ★ Co-governance WO
- ★ Diversity
- ★ Housing
- ★ LSVb
- ★ Press and Lobbying
- ★ Promotion

The portfolios to be scrapped are:

- ★ Action (now part of campaign)
- ★ Internationalisation (now part of diversity)
- ★ Mobility (scrapped completely)
- ★ Politics (now part of campaign)
- ★ Sustainability (now part of acquisition; part of election standpoints)
- ★ Website (now part of promotion)
- ★ Well-being (main goal of the union; part of election standpoints)

2.3 Association

To recruit new people for committees and co-governance, we want to hold talks before events of relevant study associations. We want to do this a while after the KEI week because it is hard to compete with other associations during that time. The Education Team used to do this before university lectures, but stopped during the period of Covid-19.

2.3.1 Membership recruitment

Currently, the GSb is missing an internal structure that focuses on growing the union, as well as a demographic that constitutes potential new members. Most student associations in Groningen focus their energy on the KEI-week to appeal to students who are new in the city. GSb runs into two problems with this demographic; Firstly, new students will not be concerned with issues that stem from the university or housing, as their experience of both is very limited in the first weeks. Secondly, most students join the KEI-week to socialise and find new friends. While the GSb does organise a fun social activity during KEI-week as well as during the year, it lacks an introduction period to truly draw people in and make them feel like they are joining a community.

While older students may be more likely to personally recognise the issues that the GSb addresses, they are already likely to have found a community. Since GSb will continue lobbying for all students, they may not see the point in joining the union.

Currently, the GSb grows through the network of its members, but eventually, the network reaches its limits, and it currently feels like there is very little scope for further growth.

In the past, the Education Team would make a tour through lectures. This came to a halt with the Covid-19 Pandemic, and has not been done since. It is not clear how effective these were, and seem outdated as a method.

As mentioned before, we hope to find a membership demographic through students who want to join and support co-governance. However, membership recruitment and outreach should be done at a different point in the calendar year, so the GSb can give new members the time to get to know and integrate into the union and the GSb can spread out its activities over the year.

A suitable time might be the second period of the first semester, when the anxiety of the year starting has died down a bit and the new board has properly settled. For example, the GSb can utilise the month of November to visit study associations' activities (or collaborate together) and hold promotional talks in conjunction with a special promotion.

2.3.2 Active membership

Over the summer, it has proven a task to keep committees running. Participation is mainly a source of members who are already in the 'activo' community, whereas 'passivo' members are rarely personally reached out to.

Members might feel like they are on the outside looking in. In order to increase participation, the Board must ensure personal contact with their members, for example by sending out personal WhatsApp invitations for activities and meetings.

There also must be more of a pay-off for becoming a member, for example, by receiving a log-in to a community space on the website and having access to behind the scenes via a Close Friends story on Instagram. If the union continues to appear stagnant, there will be no incentive for members to contribute.

Moreover, committees and working groups must carry over at least one person for at least one month to help the next Board set up shop and ensure continuity. In the case of Nait Soez'n, this has proven to make a massive difference. In the fall, there must also be an activity that includes the opportunity to recruit new committee members in person.

2.3.3 The Office

As of 2024, the GSb finds itself in a new location. The new office is next to the University Museum on the Oude Kijk In't Jatstraat. It is important that the location of the office is clear to students, for example, by sufficient signage.

However, it is to be noted that the office space is limited and does not provide the space for members to meet. As of now, members tend to visit the Board only with appointment. Combined with the fact that most students tend to prefer email nowadays over calling, it puts a strain on the Board to be continually present in the age of flexible working space.

Option 1 is that the GSb must increase its openness, using its closer location to the city centre to its advantage and providing a space for its members to socialise (e.g. by providing a cheap lunch through means of tosti and coffee, smoothie Thursdays).

Option 2 is that the GSb becomes more flexible with their office space and for example leaves the landline in favour of a mobile line. This allows for Board members to have the option to work from home.

3.0 Committees and Working Groups

In order to emphasise the independence of working groups and to encourage active members to develop their own vision on their role in the union, we have asked representatives to write their own piece in this part of the policy plan instead of the Board writing these parts themselves. Naturally, these visions are signed off upon by Board 53.

3.1 Activities Committee

The AcCie will keep **organising activities** in the coming year. Most of them will be fun activities for member bonding. We will also organise informational activities since the DiscusCie was dissolved. We will also sometimes help Board members with organising activities. The goal is organising at least six activities in 2024. The activities will be promoted through **social media**, the website and the newsletter.

3.2 Education Team

This year, the Education Team will once again focus on supporting the Education portfolio holders on behalf of the GSb Board. We aim to achieve this by concentrating as a team on education-related matters at the Hanze University of Applied Sciences and the University of Groningen.

Several goals have been set for this year regarding the Hanze University of Applied Sciences. Firstly, we aim to participate in **co-governance**. The goal here is to increase the GSb's influence on the educational policies of the Hanze. The second objective revolves around **enhancing the visibility** of the Groninger Student Union within the Hanze University of Applied Sciences. Through discussions with the Hanze, efforts will be made to take concrete actions to raise the GSb's awareness at the HBO level. This includes **aiming for a higher number of active members** within the association who come from the HBO. Thirdly, the Education Team of the GSb will draft the **election programme** for the Hanze University of Applied Sciences' factions. This is done to **raise the political awareness** of the students.

Goals have also been established concerning the University of Groningen. Firstly, the objective is to **organise the participation council debate** for the University. This organisation encompasses practical aspects such as speakers and locations, as well as promoting this event. Also, this year, the Education Team is responsible

for creating the **political compass** in collaboration with the UKrant. The Education Team will gather and present the substantive information for this compass to the UKrant, where it will be published prior to the elections for the University Council. Thirdly, the Education Team of the GSb will draft the **election programme** for the factions of the Faculties of the University of Groningen. This is once again aimed at **raising the political consciousness** of the students.

3.3 Legal Helpdesk

Legal helpdesk will get a **rebrand**. Right now incoming mail is low. Legal helpdesk has determined this is due to the intimidating factor of the term '**legal**'; some students just need advice regarding the bureaucratic system of the university. Therefore the members of the legal helpdesk seek to expand their scope with the new rebrand. The precise name and content of the promotion will be determined in collaboration with the Designer's Collective. Promotion for the legal helpdesk will be included in the budget. The exact proposal will be presented at the **January GMA**.

There used to be a **judicial blog** on the website, the Legal Helpdesk wants to start this up again. These are blogs with a wide range of topics to do with students and judicial matters. We also want to **update our page** on the website with more up-to-date information.

3.4 Nait Soez'n

Firstly, the editors of the *Nait Soez'n* aim to continue business as has been done in recent years. This means that there will be **two physical editions** released; one in winter and one in summer respectively. The editions of 2024 are planned to be finished in January and July (with possible set-back to spread physical copies at the beginning of September).

For the promotion of the physical magazine, we want to take steps towards structurally increasing its presence in the city. For the 2024 editions, a **distribution plan** will be written. We can use facilities that are already present in the office, such as distributing containers across the faculties where copies can be stored and taken by students. For this, it must be investigated at which faculties this is possible.

Distributing the *Nait* in the online environment starts with the **website**, which needs an update. The website is referred to via social media channels such as LinkedIn and Instagram, as well as in the physical copies. It is very important that it is up to date and accessible. Not only the PDF versions of the full magazine, but

also **individual articles** need the option to be referred to by themselves. In order to highlight the writers' work and to make the website more engaging, the idea is to publish articles from new editions by themselves.

In consultation with the editors, an inventory is made of whether it is possible to translate some articles into **English** so that the *Nait Soez'n* also reaches the English-speaking student population of Groningen. This is in line with the recent efforts made by GSb to become a bilingual association that is open to international students.

3.4.1 Designer's Collective

To make the graphic design of the *Nait Soez'n* run more smoothly than in recent years, a 'Designer's Collective' has been set up with several students who can all contribute to the **design of the Nait**. In this way, not one sole person is charged with the task of shaping the entire publication, as experience shows this is a risk. Additionally, the designer's collective may take some creative liberty in the general **outward presentation of the GSb**, for example on other promotional materials and online. The Collective now consists of three people. During the policy year, it will be evaluated whether there is a desire to establish the designer's collective as an independent committee and/or recruit more members.

3.5 Research Bureau

The Research Bureau of the Groninger Studentenbond is going to publish a **research paper** at the end of the academic year. The paper entails relevant ideas and problems surrounding students. The members of the team are going to use interviews and/or surveys to build the study and they will analyse this data. The results will be **shown to stakeholders of the GSb**, such as the municipality of Groningen, RuG and Hanzehogeschool. The publishing of the paper and the meeting with stakeholders will attract lots of **press**.